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ABSTRACT

The Chicago public school system has a 50 percent dropout rate, low-achieving students, a nonresponsive bureaucracy, and many related urban school problems. The Chicago School Reform Act, PA 85-1418, was enacted by the Illinois legislature in 1989 to address the situation. To determine the effectiveness of the Chicago school reform movement thus far, 100 Chicago teachers in 10 schools were surveyed. The responses indicate that no gains have been made in student achievement, school discipline, teacher morale, collegiality, school climate, teacher involvement in decision making, or job satisfaction. Most teachers agree that smaller class size, more security, reduced paperwork, more instructional materials, and higher teacher salaries would improve student achievement and working conditions. Teachers are not optimistic about the Local School Councils (each composed of six parents, two community representatives, and one principal) created to decentralize school administration. The results of the survey are presented in tables. A bibliography of 11 items follows. (DM)

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CHICAGO TEACHERS

AND SCHOOL REFORM

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In 1985 the Illinois legislature passed SB 1840 the School Reform Act for the State of Illinois and in 1989 enacted PA 85-1418 the Chicago School Reform Act the Chicago school system. The structures, requirements and procedures to reform the Chicago schools are more drastic and heavy-handed than those for the state of Illinois.

The reason for the more restrictive measures is that the Chicago public school system has a 50% dropout rate, low achieving students, a bloated, non-responsive bureaucracy and a myriad of related urban school problems that have lingered for decades. The goals of the Chicago School Reform Act include:

1. Increase the daily attendance by 1% annually
2. Increase the number of graduates by 5% annually
3. Decrease the failures/dropouts by 10%
4. Increase the number of students scoring at national norms so that at least 50% are achieving at or better than the national norms by 1994.

Included in the Chicago reform package is shifting the control of the schools from the central office to the local schools. The Local School Councils are made up of eleven members--6 parents, 2 community representatives, 2 teachers and 1 principal. There are

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540 LSCs, which constitutes a board of education for each school with the power to evaluate, hire and fire the principal, approve expenditure and school improvement plans, advise the principal on textbook selection, attendance and discipline policies, evaluate allocation of teaching resources and staff and related duties relative to school boards. In addition, Chicago teachers have been given some, but limited, school-based management responsibilities through the Professional Personnel Advisory Committee (PPAC). The PPAC, which is made up of certified teachers and staff, excluding the principal, advises the LSC and the principal on education matters.

The concerns regarding school reform predicted by the Carnegie Report in 1986 appears to have echoed in the Chicago school reform movement, i.e., teachers are not an integral part of the reform process. Teachers are taken for granted and few gains will be realized for the students. The literature has repeatedly pointed out that school-based management without integral teacher involvement in decision-making school reform is likely to fail in making any difference in the quality of education.

To determine the status and current success of school reform, 100 Chicago teachers in 10 schools were surveyed. A self-devised instrument was distributed to Chicago teachers in education administration graduate classes at a state university and in the respective schools where they worked. The results appear to support the Carnegie Report prognosis.

Results:

The findings show teachers see little change in those things that effect teaching and learning. The "classroom is ignored." Their responses are categorized in terms of: 1) opinions of school reform, 2) the effect of reform in the schools, 3) changes that would improve school reform, 4) the politics of school reform and 5) open-ended comments.

Findings in Table I show that teachers are divided on the linkage between teacher salary and performance and the fairness of the 45 day Chicago teacher remediation plan. (Suburban teachers have one year to remedy teaching deficiencies.) They are also unsure of the influence the Professional Personnel Advisory Committee (PPAC), although 42% as opposed to 25% are satisfied with its performance. Sixty-five percent of the teachers confirm that rincipal is a member of the PPAC, contrary to the intent of PA 85-1418.

On the other hand, 56% of the teachers oppose non-classroom teachers being elected to the LSC, and they also feel LSC teacher representatives should retain the right to vote on the principal's contract. While teachers believe the principal's authority has not been compromised (influenced by the principal's PPAC membership), they favor the retention of teacher tenure for principals. The unfairness of the revocation of tenure status for principals and the respondent's administrative aspirations may have influenced their responses. Nevertheless, 69% of the teachers wanted to participate in school management decisions.

On the issue of school reform improvement, the results in Table II indicate that no gains have been made in student

achievement, school discipline (which was cited by 65% of teachers as the most serious problem in the schools), teacher morale, collegiality, school climate, involvement in decision-making and job satisfaction. They are divided on parent involvement. The results are statistically significant at the .05 level of confidence on all school improvement issues, except for teacher and parent involvement.

Table III shows some concrete recommendations by the respondents to improve the schools. The majority agree that smaller class sizes, more security, reduced paperwork, more instructional materials, more support from administration and parents and more federal and state funding and higher teacher salaries would significantly enhance student enhance and working conditions. Better pay for Chicago teachers is critical. They make $10,000 to $20,000 less than suburban teachers who have more conducive working conditions, smaller class sizes, better prepared students, fewer discipline problems and greater parental support. Chicago teachers work under highly stressful and adverse conditions, and are responsible for teaching some of the most difficult to educate students who have a myriad of developmental, familial and social problems, compounded by poverty and neglect. It goes without saying, that overly large class sizes of 30 or more students as compared to the smaller class size in suburban schools, inadequate facilities, lack of textbooks and teaching materials, serious discipline problems and the lack of administrative and parental support in many inner-city schools is not encouraging for the educational future of Chicago school students unless some immediate

changes are instituted. Although the sample feels they should receive comparative compensation to that of suburban teachers, they are divided on the issue of "more rest periods and breaks." The close-campus schedule requires teachers to supervise their students continuously throughout the entire day, including eating lunch with them, with no respite. Many teachers report they cannot get a break to go to the restroom. Are these working conditions conducive to teaching and learning? More importantly, how many young teachers will be attracted to teach in Chicago.

In regards to political issues (listed in Table IV), teachers are not very optimistic. They believe parents will lose interest in the LSC, some LSC members will interfere with the day-to-day operation of the school and the schools will become increasingly politicized. But they don't believe their respective principals has or will side with the LSC against the teachers. Perhaps the teacher LSC representatives are the controlling factor? They are ambivalent as to the success of school reform, because there has been no or little impact at the classroom level.

To the open-ended questions, the interpreted trend of the responses (see Table V) are:

1. What are the most serious problems in the schools?
    a. discipline
    b. student motivation
2. What improvements or changes would you make?
    a. Reduce class size
    b. Harsher penalties for disruptive students

3. What are the greatest strengths of school reform?
    a. Parent involvement
    b. Teachers, parents and community working together
4. What are the greatest weaknesses of school reform?
    a. Lack of LSC training
    b. LSC members with less education than the professional educators making decisions on matters of which they know little or nothing
5. How could teachers have more say-so in managing their school?
    a. Give all teachers the opportunity to voice their concerns to the PPAC and LSC
    b. Attend LSC meetings
6. What should be the role of the PPAC?
    a. Liaison between LSC and PPAC
    b. Advisory to the LSC
    c. Evaluate and formulate curriculum and school management and discipline policies
    d. Solve school/classroom problems and report to non-PPAC members
7. Describe your job satisfaction before and after school reform.
    a. The same
    b. Unable to say
    c. More frustrating after school reform

The findings suggest that until school reform directly reaches the classroom the intent of school reform will not be implemented.

The quality of education, student achievement, attendance and graduate rate, dropout reduction, preparation of students for employment and higher education and teacher autonomy over classroom instruction and teaching will not be improved.

TABLE I
Teachers' Opinions of Chicago School Reform

1.	Should teachers' salaries be related in part to teacher effectiveness?	Yes 33	No 46	D.K.17
2.	Is your principal a member of PPAC?	Yes 65*	No 19	D.K.11
3.	Are you satisfied with the role and functioning of PPAC?	Yes 42*	No 25	D.K.29
4.	Do you want to make management decisions that effect your school?	Yes 69*	No 20	D.K.10
5.	Has the authority of the principal been diluted?	Yes 43	No 42	D.K.14
6.	Should the principal retain his/her tenure as a teacher?	Yes 77*	No 6	D.K.13
7.	Should LSC teachers lose the right to vote on the principal's contract?	Yes 21	No 71*	D.K.7
8.	Is the 45 day remedial plan for teacher retention fair?	Yes 38	No 29	D.K.29
9.	Should facilitators, coordinators, assistant principals, counselors represent teachers on the LSC?	Yes 29	No 56*	D.K.11
10.	Do you feel the political community is over represented on the LSC?	Yes 35	No 42	D.K.22

TABLE II

11. Has School Reform caused any improvement in the following areas?

a.	Student achievement	Yes 08	No 75*	D.K.13
b.	School climate	Yes 18	No 72*	D.K.09
c.	Teacher morale	Yes 16	No 77*	D.K.06
d.	Teacher collegiality	Yes 18	No 60*	D.K.21
e.	Student discipline	Yes 08	No 85*	D.K.06
f.	Teacher involvement in decision-making	Yes 37	No 50	D.K.12
g.	Parent involvement	Yes 44	No 44	D.K.11
h.	Job satisfaction	Yes 14	No 77*	D.K.08

* significant at the .05 level of confidence

TABLE III

13.	Which factors would improve School Reform?					
	a. Reduce class size to 20 students	Yes	86*	No	06	D.K. 07
	b. More police officers in school	Yes	54*	No	28	D.K. 17
	c. More breaks & rest periods for teachers	Yes	47	No	42	D.K. 07
	d. Reduce caperwork for teachers	Yes	93*	No	04	D.K. 02
	e. New and more instructional materials	Yes	90*	No	04	D.K. 05
	f. Increase salaries of teachers	Yes	81*	No	07	D.K. 11
	g. More support from the administration	Yes	86*	No	06	D.K. 07
	h. More support from parents	Yes	94*	No	02	D.K. 03
	i. More financial support from the state and federal government	Yes	93*	No	01	D.K. 05

TABLE IV

Opinions of certain political Issues

14.	Parents will lose interest in the LSC?	Yes	46*	No	24	D.K. 26
15.	Schools will become politicized.	Yes	70*	No	09	D.K. 17
16.	Principals will side with LSC against teachers	Yes	32	No	32	D.K. 32
17.	Parents will interfere with the operation of the school.	Yes	52*	No	19	D.K. 25
18.	School reform will succeed.	Yes	24	No	32	D.K. 40

* significant at .05 level of confidence.

TABLE V

Responses to Open-ended Questions

19. What is the most serious problem in the school?
    a. Discipline 65%
    b. Lack of student motivation 17%
    c. Lack of parental involvement 14%
    d. Low morale of staff 11%
    e. Negative working relationships of staff 8%
20. What improvements or changes would you make?
    a. Reduce class size 13%
    b. Give stiffer penalties to disrutive students 10%
    c. Remove disruptive students from regular classrooms 9%
    d. Increase parent involvement 9%
    e. Increase teacher support, recognition and praise 5%
21. What are the greatest strengths or opportunities of School Reform?
    a. Parent involvement 28%
    b. Teachers, parents, and the community working together 21%
    c. Tailoring needs to fit the school 13%
    d. More after-school programs 4%
    e. More accountability of staff 4%
22. What are the greatest weaknesses or threats of School Reform?
    a. Lack of LSC training 14%
    b. LSC has too much control 13%
    c. Uneducated persons making policies and rules for the school 13%
    d. Removing great people (principals) without just cause 9%
    e. Using the LSC for political purposes 7%
23. How could teachers have more say-so in managing their schools?
    a. Giving all teachers a chance to voice opinions 15%
    b. Attending LSC meetings 9%
    c. Helping to make school policies and rules 8%
    d. Sharing their ideas and information with the PPAC 5%
    e. Adding more teachers to the LSC 5%
24. What should be the role of the PPAC?
    a. Liaison between the professional staff and LSC 24%
    b. Advisory to the LSC 10%
    c. Helping to formulate curriculum and policies decisions 9%
    d. Solving problems and reporting to non-PPAC members 5%
    e. Enhancing the professionalism of the school 4%
25. Describe your job satisfaction before and after school reform.
    a. Same 43%
    b. Unable to say 13%
    c. More frustrating after School Reform 11%
    d. More satisfaction after School Reform 8%

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